



The Insider

February 5, 2010

www.SenSwitalski.com

Fiscal Responsibility Caucus Routed Again

Core Credits Pilfer School Funds

Sometimes a flash of inspiration hits you from an unexpected source.

Last week, my friend Ron Jelinek (R-Three Oaks) spoke on the Senate Floor against a tax credit for battery cores in heavy earthmoving equipment. He didn't like it because it would mean less money was available in the state budget for schools.

The amount of money was small, only \$250,000, compared to most budget items, which are in the millions and billions. School Aid, for instance, amounts to about \$13 billion. I was going to vote for the bill, because it was such a small amount and would help business recycle.

But Jelinek's speech made me think. If this tax credit was such a good thing, why didn't we find some money to pay for it? Why didn't we cut some other credit or program, that wasn't producing good results, and transfer the money to this credit? Or why not raise a fee or a tax to pay for this credit, if it was such a good idea?

The legislature doesn't ask itself those questions very often, and maybe that's why we have a \$1.7 billion deficit.

So I got up right after my Republican friend, and I announced that I was going to change my mind and vote no. I'm not saying we don't listen to one another much, but it was the first time in the history of the Senate that a speech actually changed someone's mind. It didn't matter that the idea came from a Republican. It mattered that the idea made sense.

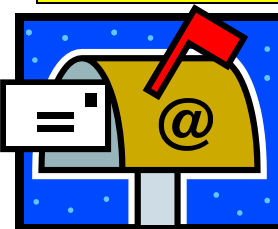
Fiscal Responsibility is a principle that cuts across party lines. And Jelinek and I are the top Appropriation members from each party. That gives us some credibility. As the Appropriations Leaders, we opposed the bill, because the tax credit was going to add to an already huge School Aid deficit. Schools are already facing a \$420 million short-

—Continued on page 2

The E-Insider Gets a Make-Over

This issue of the E-Insider unveils our new design. I hope you like it and find it easier to read and enjoy. Most important, I hope it leads to a conversation that we will both benefit from.

—Mickey Switalski



Mailbox:

Texting While Driving

My Honors American Literature class at Regina High School has been discussing the importance of newspapers. We discussed and read editorials and came across an editorial recently printed in our local paper, The Macomb Daily, urging our state legislators to pass the texting while driving bill.



The issue of texting and phoning while driving is one that affects the teens I teach, and I shared with my class some of the arguments on both sides of the issue concerning the bill. I encouraged them to write letters to their senators expressing their own opinions on the issue.

—Vivian Sawicki

Regina High School

As I reach the legal driving age, the more I realize how important it is to be a safe driver. According to a Washington Post article, 5,870 people died in 2008 because of accidents involving drivers who were using their cell phones. I know if there is a cell phone ban, I will not be tempted to answer a text message or accept a call while driving. When I drive with friends, I always

—Continued on page 2

Fiscal Responsibility Caucus Con't...

fall which would require a \$268 per pupil cut. It would be fiscally irresponsible to add to that.

My Democratic colleagues Buzz Thomas (D-Detroit) and Irma Clark-Coleman (D-Detroit) and Republicans friends Patty Birkholz (R-Saugatuck) and Bruce Patterson (R-Canton) joined in on what I call the "Fiscal Responsibility Caucus." We lost the vote, 31-6. But we made our point. Responsible government means adopting the principle known as "Pay As You Go."

The next session day, Buzz and I introduced a Pay/Go resolution. If approved by the voters of Michigan, it would amend the State Constitution to require any bill that costs money must be tied to a bill to pay for the costs, either by reducing other state spending or by increasing

state revenues.

We were pleased when Governor Granholm endorsed the Pay as You Go principle in her Reform speech last week. President Obama called for it at the Federal level in his State of the Union speech. It is hard to stick to Pay as You Go when someone proposes a popular program. But if we have the discipline to enforce it, this principle can have remarkable effects on budgets.

Such discipline has only been exhibited a few times and for short periods. But when the Feds did it during the 90's, the effect was dramatic. Chronic deficits turned into a \$400 billion surplus.

Getting things right is hard. It is painful. But it is the fiscal remedy that Michigan Government needs now. For more information and a video of my Senate Floor statement, check out my new website www.SenSwitalski.com.

Letters — continued

offer to answer their calls or respond to their texts to lessen the risk of getting into an accident because they were busy on their phones.

A. B.

I am a teenager, and I would not want cell phone use to be a risk to me while driving. I have experienced just how careless a driver can be when trying to check their cell phone or call someone.

A.L., Clinton Township

As a new driver, I feel that a cell phone should not be used to text or call while driving.

C. B., Clinton Township

Another reason why it would be a disadvantage would be if you got lost, you would not be able to call for help and have someone direct you to your destination. In my opinion, I think that this bill should be revised. It should not ban the total use of cell phones while driving but put a limit on them, such as not texting.

S. D., Sterling Heights

With this cell phone ban, I think that yes they should be banned but with the rules of allowing handsfree phones or Bluetooths. Also there should be an age when people could actually use their cell phones to call people while driving. People who are in their 30s or 40s are experienced drivers able to handle the phones while driving unlike teenagers who just got their license and think they can drive and talk on the phone at the same time.

N. H.

The great distraction that a cell phone provides is hazardous to other people who are driving on the road, the people in the car you're driving, as well as yourself. I must

disagree with the secondary offense that this is classified under.

R. S., Clinton Township

Dear Regina Students:

Thank you for the thoughtful letters, and other readers are free to email or text me their thoughts, hopefully not while driving.

I actually introduced a similar bill that sought to require hands free cell devices while driving. But the Senate recently passed a bill with my support, which seeks to ban texting while driving with exceptions for emergency situations to call for help. The bill must still gain passage in the House and be signed by the Governor in order to become law.

The lively Senate debate focused on one aspect of the bill, over whether the offense should be given primary or secondary enforcement. In primary enforcement, a law enforcement officer may stop and ticket you for texting while driving. If secondary, the officer can only stop you for some other legitimate reason, but can then ticket you for texting.

Many people, including the police, argued for primary enforcement. But supporters of the bill, who often agreed with the concept of primary enforcement, believed that the bill would die and never become law if it contained primary enforcement. I agreed and joined like minded Senators to defeat the primary amendment.

We followed this same approach with seat belts, first requiring secondary enforcement for about 4 years before strengthening the law to primary. This allows people time to adjust to a new law and slowly change behavior.

The law should be stable, and changed carefully, and in this case I think a gradual change is the pragmatic approach.

—Mickey